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INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE
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RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 2701
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RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 1064
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 3088
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 2474
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO BRUSSELS BE
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RUEHLMC/MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORP
RUMICEA/USCENTCOM INTEL CEN MACDILL AFB FL

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BISHKEK 001031

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SUBJECT: FRENCH CHARGE: KYRGYZSTAN IN RUSSIAN SPHERE OF
INFLUENCE

REF: BISHKEK 1015

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Classified By: Amb. Tatiana Gfoeller, Reason 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: In an October 6 courtesy call, French Charge Jean-Pierre Godart told the Ambassador that he believed the Russians would help Kyrgyzstan through this winter's challenges. In Godart's view, Kyrgyzstan is in the Russian sphere of influence, and for that reason, it is foolish to demand too much of the Kyrgyz. Accordingly, he opined, Kyrgyzstan would probably accede to Russian demands to recognize South Ossetia and Abkhazia at the CIS summit. Regarding Manas Air Base, Godart suggested that Russian pressure on the Kyrgyz to close the Base is not genuine, but rather part of a Kyrgyz-Russian conspiracy to extract more USG money for the Base and frighten us regarding Russian powers of retaliation here. He concluded that a policy of studied indifference would serve the U.S. better than a full diplomatic press. End summary.

Kyrgyzstan is a Russian Colony

¶2. (C) Ambassador made an October 6 courtesy call on permanent French Charge Jean-Pierre Godart, and discussed Kyrgyz preparations for the upcoming winter, relations between Kyrgyzstan and France and the European Union (EU), the upcoming Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) summit and the situation with Manas Air Base. Godart opined that Kyrgyzstan comes across fundamentally as a Russian colony, and added that deeper knowledge of the country and region (he claims to be an expert) does not change that perception. After seventeen years of so-called independence, Godart observed, the Kyrgyz are just as dependent on the Russians as they were on the Soviets. Channeling Sartre, Godart said that the Kyrgyz enjoy this dependence, because it frees them from the responsibility of having to "grow up and make hard decisions." Godart expected that the coming winter would be difficult, and cited as reasons a Kyrgyz lack of preparation and the blind faith that the Russians would eventually come

to their aid and tell them what to do. He surmised that Russia would indeed do so, which clearly distinguishes Russia's role in Kyrgyzstan from that of France, the EU, or the United States.

A Limited Arc of Influence

13. (C) In Godart's view, Kyrgyzstan is legitimately within the Russian sphere of influence. Neither France nor the EU have any real interests here, and therefore have no intention of challenging Russia's status as *primus inter pares*. In fact, Godart claimed, Russia plays a useful role in minimizing the chaos that would otherwise flow from the unconstrained choices of a wholly free (and feckless in his opinion) Kyrgyz administration. Godart did grant that Manas Air Base gives the U.S. a limited arc of influence within the Russian sphere, but cautioned that it is unreasonable to try to compete with the Russians in their own back yard.

Critique of Georgian "Foolishness"

14. C) Godart believed that Russia could press strongly or recognition of both Ossetia and Abkhazia at the CIS summit, and he predicted that at least Kyrgyzstan would accede, a potential outcome that he viewed with equanimity. In his view, Russia had clearly over-reacted in the Caucasus, but Georgian President Saakashvili had been at least equally "foolish" in his initial attack and in shelling civilian targets. Godart added that it is too much to ask Kyrgyzstan to stand up to Russia in this matter, because they have little to gain from defiance, and Georgia certainly did not

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consult them when it started the war.

Pressuring Manas Air Base--A Cunning Plan?

15. (C) Godart advanced a novel explanation for recent signs of Russian pressure on Manas Air Base. He believes that the pressure is not genuine -- the Russians do not actually want the Base closed, because they have a strong interest in a stable Afghanistan, and "would rather the Americans bleed there than themselves." But they are genuinely furious with the U.S. reaction to their role in Georgia, and undermining our confidence in the Base's tenure is an effective way of "making the U.S. sweat." And this cunning plan also affords the Kyrgyz an opportunity to demonstrate the pressure that they are experiencing, giving them a stronger hand when negotiating compensation for the Base. "In the end both the Kyrgyz and the Russians will get what they want from you," he predicted. "The Kyrgyz will blackmail you into giving them more money for the Base and the Russians will enjoy having given you a good scare."

A Policy of Nonchalance

16. (C) In a previous meeting, the Canadian Ambassador to the Kyrgyz Republic had suggested that Post enlist French and German Embassies in expressing support for Manas. (See reftel.) On October 3, Ambassador raised this suggestion with the German Ambassador, who reacted with horror, apparently at the idea of associating Germany with Manas Air Base and crossing swords with Russia, if even indirectly. Ambassador now raised the idea with Charge Godart, who demurred for different reasons. Godart said that Manas Air Base is crucial for Afghanistan and for France's participation in the International Security Assistance Force, and that the French Embassy frequently raises these points with the Kyrgyz government and thanks the Kyrgyz effusively for their hospitality. But in this case, he noted, too much diplomatic support would over-inflate the Base's importance, and lead to greater monetary demands from the Kyrgyz.

Better, he suggested, to adopt a policy of nonchalance, and act as if we have other options if the price becomes too high. He added with a chuckle that he had American (pocketbook) interests at heart in proffering this advice. "All we French pay for the Base is a symbolic amount. It's your money I am trying to save." He concluded, however, on a more sober note, saying that he would raise this suggestion (while advising against it) with the French Ambassador to the Kyrgyz Republic, based in Kazakhstan.

Comment

¶7. (C) Godart's theory on recent developments surrounding Manas Base is novel; we have not heard it from any other interlocutor around town. We report it in the interests of giving the fullest possible picture of speculation regarding this subject and note that Godart is not just a disinterested observer but the Chief of Mission of a country with a permanent contingent at Manas.

GFOELLER